Anthony Hernandez

# Trustees

Mrs. Albert Abramson Mrs. Melvin G. Alper Mrs. Philip Amram Smith Bagley Mrs. Bernhard G. Bechhoefer, ex officio James Biddle Niles Bond, Secretary Chester Carter Lee M. Folger Carl M. Freeman John H. Hall, Jr., Second Vice-President George E. Hamilton, Jr. Hugh N. Jacobsen Freeborn G. Jewett, Jr., First Vice-President Gilbert H. Kinney David Lloyd Kreeger, President Mrs. John A. Logan Charles McKittrick The Honorable J. William Middendorf, II Constance Mellon Mrs. John U. Nef Mandell J. Ourisman Maxwell Oxman Mrs. Donald A. Petrie Mrs. Raymond Rasenberger, ex officio Mrs. Walter Salant B. Francis Saul, II Leonard L. Silverstein Adolph Slaughter Mrs. John Lewis Smith Carleton B. Swift, Jr. Corcoran Thom, Jr. Mrs. Wynant D. Vanderpool, Jr. Robert L. Walsh, Jr. Mrs. Brainard H. Warner, III J. Burke Wilkinson Curtin Winsor, Jr., Assistant Treasurer The Honorable Stanley Woodward Mrs. David Yerkes Henry Ravenel, Jr., Treasurer Trustees Emeritus Frederick M. Bradley David E. Finley Charles C. Glover, Jr. Gordon Gray

### Staff

Roy Slade, *Director and Dean*Jane Livingston, *Chief Curator*Dorothy W. Phillips, *Curator of Collections*Donna Ari, *Curator of Education*Frances Fralin, *Assistant Curator*Linda C. Simmons, *Assistant Curator of Collections*Susan Grady, *Registrar*Constance Broadstone, *Development Officer*Robert Stiegler, *Comptroller*Einar Gomo, *Building Superintendent* 

# The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976 Anthony Hernandez

The Corcoran Gallery of Art Washington, D.C.

The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976 is an unprecedented Bicentennial project originated by The Corcoran Gallery of Art. Eight eminent American photographers have been invited to spend extended periods—at least a month—in Washington, D.C. during 1975-76 to photograph the city, its environs and people, as each was guided by his own vision. Thus we hoped to achieve a diversified documentation of a place and time. A selection of four prints by each artist is to be earmarked for exhibition at the Corcoran in the Tricentennial year 2076.

The participating artists, each shown separately, two at a time in four stages throughout the year 1976, are LEWIS BALTZ, San Francisco; JOE CAMERON, Washington, D.C.; ROBERT CUMMING, Los Angeles; ROY DeCARAVA, New York City; LEE FRIED-LANDER, New City, New York; JOHN GOSSAGE, Washington, D.C.; JAN GROOVER, New York City; and ANTHONY HERNANDEZ, Los Angeles.

The artists were selected by Chief Curator Jane Livingston and Assistant Curator Frances Fralin. As organizers of this series of exhibitions they have been responsible for the complete task of scheduling and working with the artists at every stage of the project's long development, and for producing the eight catalogues. I wish to express my special appreciation to them and to each of the eight artists for their unstinting cooperation.

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D.C., and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., a federal agency.

Roy Slade, Director

The photographs of Anthony Hernandez begin to take on the authority of a powerful camera style distinctive to this Los Angeles artist. It is an approach perhaps relating to Diane Arbus and ultimately to Robert Frank; but there are great differences. For his 1976 Washington, D.C. photographs. Hernandez chose to concentrate on people in the city streets, staying in commercial downtown areas whose look and atmosphere are characteristic of big American cities in general; at first glance we miss the special structural weight and officialdom we find in some sections of the Capital. It doesn't take long. however, to begin to recognize the city in its uniqueness-the breadth of the streets, the relative horizontality of the buildings and various other architectural particularities. The people inhabiting the streets are of course crucial to the photographs, but Hernandez' subjects are not psychologically isolated from their environs as, for example, occurs with Arbus. They become a part of the landscape. Their facial expressions, sometimes flaccid, sometimes preoccupied, rarely pleasingly alert as in response to the camera or another person, tend to isolate Hernandez' subjects from one another but to integrate them with their environments. This is reinforced by a way Hernandez has of capturing his subjects in motion. Strangely enough, the people photographed in standing or sitting positions appear to be in a quickened state as much as those actually walking or gesturing. This character of animation is partly created by the rhythm of the entire picture—in fact the sense of movement occurs largely through the odd excitement of pavement and foliage and in the expanding or radiating angular patterns of background elements. Despite a slight tendency to find somewhat bizarre types, these are ordinary people and not freaks.

Often Hernandez centers figures or objects in the picture matrix. Surrounding the figure or figure group the ground detail begins to look crazily skewed, tip-

ping away and out of the frame; the image seems not able to be contained. Contributing to this disequilibrium is Hernandez' way of cropping figures. A figure may be seen from just above the feet to the top of the head, tilting slightly forward; often subjects assume incipiently hunched postures, arms pressed to bodies or hands shielding eyes. Sometimes the vertiginousness of the entire composition is so palpable that one imagines the camera being actually swung out or manipulated into an up-tilted position. and yet it is obvious that the photographs are finely controlled. This tension between an air of combined activeness and distortion on the one hand, and absolutely purposeful pictorial selection on the other, works to create some extraordinarily memorable images. Another way of clarifying the pictures' paradoxical quality is to contrast the hardness and tautness of the images with their urgent sentience.

Light in Hernandez' photographs is unusual. In memory, it seems dramatic, even lush; I am somehow reminded of Manuel Alvarez Bravo's evocation of the light particular to Mexico, not in its specific place but in kind of intensity. But as one looks again at the actual photographs, one becomes aware that the light and dark contrast is not so excessively pronounced: it is something about the compositions themselves, their energy and wildness, that makes them seem more intensely illuminated than they are.

It is instructive to compare Hernandez' photographs to those of another artist in the present series of exhibitions, Roy De Carava. In this context DeCarava's photography begins to appear extremely balanced and deliberative. He would capture a man walking in the street after hunting him down, watching and watching, carefully following and framing him; Hernandez, on the other hand, would seem to calculate quickly, to duck slightly and seize the shot as though he'd be caught in the act—but not at a dangerous moment. So the subject-matter itself doesn't look dramatic or full of tension but the whole photograph

does. DeCarava's photographs are quiescent, probing, compassionate, classical in their subject and technique; Hernandez' are mannerist, audacious, a little frenzied. His people become at once energized and abstracted—the abstractness comes from the artist's not choosing anecdotal or decisive moments; he selects unconscious moments. He is not interested in capturing little transactions or events. (It is interesting to separate him in this way from journalistic photographers.) One can't make an imagined vignette out of his photographs, as you might with Arbus, or even DeCarava. Hernandez leaves you with very little except the energy itself, and the fact itself of unawareness.

Hernandez shares with Roy DeCarava, and not so much with Lewis Baltz, the tendency to express a life-view in his photographs. Though the works are entirely unsentimental, we see the artist's special way of looking at humanity. His people are perhaps somewhat at odds with their environment in the sense of stiffness and alienation, yet they are also actually defined by that environment. The camera gets right into its subject, without much technical or mental distancing; the hard surfaces are the result of the photographer's clarity and his intensely rapid scrutiny, leaving no residue of blurredness or that feeling of the lens caressing its subject that we see in other photographers. In fact the compositions themselves are really not compositions at all as we usually think of the term. (The word is in any event a deceiving one.) Nor is "slice of life" the proper term for this work. We are seeing a genuinely original photographic approach.

Hernandez may be one of the few photographers to have taken what is essentially a 1960s street-life esthetic, perhaps originating in cinema, and made of it an enduring art form, free of simplistic or moralizing commentary. The challenge is great: to use aleatory transactions in city neighborhoods as sub-

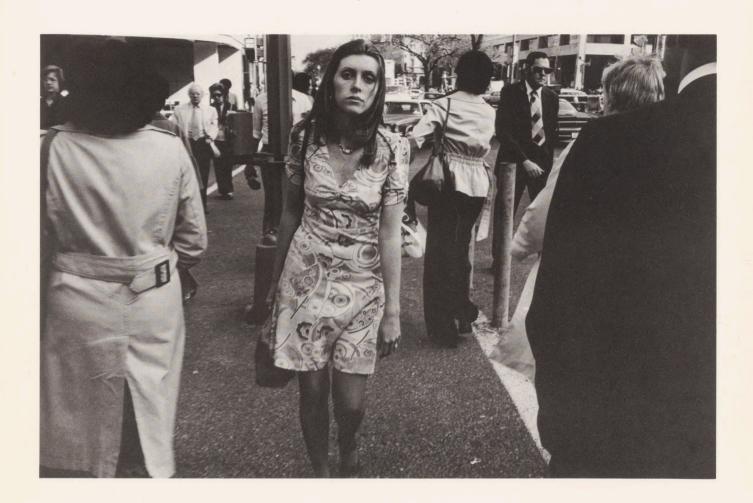
iect matter invites melodrama. One of the reasons for success is Hernandez' eschewing of such tricks as catching things reflected in windows (neon signs saying "liquor" backward or passing sun-glassed faces), or glints of light hitting the lens, or creating obvious contrasts between sharply focused foregrounds and soft backgrounds or vice versa. To this extent he is a photographer in the purist vein; but he is also daring. He takes chances with his camera angles and framings—but the degree of distortion is always very slight. The best photographs have the sense of not holding back. They are heady and exciting; they are at the same time implacable and disturbing. He resists the temptation to go so unsparingly into his subjects' disfigurements or physical oddities that we are fascinated by grotesqueness; nor does he sneer at his subjects, or laugh at them. We are back to the interplay between the figures stopped in motion and their remarkably expressive backgrounds, and faced with the conclusion that it is the eye of the artist that creates from the most plain reality the most enduringly arousing images.

Jane Livingston































# Catalogue of the Exhibition

Untitled 1 through Untitled 19, inclusive. All images approximately 10-3/4" x 7" on 11" x 14" paper.

### **Anthony Hernandez**

Born Los Angeles, California, 1947.
Attended East Los Angeles College, 1966-1967.
Medic in the United States Army, 1967-1969.
Attended Center of the Eye (Lee Friedlander Seminar)
Aspen, Colorado, 1969.
Received Ferguson Grant awarded by the Friends of
Photography, Carmel, California, 1972.
Received an individual fellowship in photography from
The National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C.,
1975.
Lives Los Angeles, California.

### **Group Exhibitions**

- 1969 "Fiesta de los Barrios," Los Angeles, California.
- 1970 "California Photographers," University of California, Davis; The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California; Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California. Catalogue.
- 1971 "The Crowded Vacancy," (with L'ewis Baltz and Terry Wild), University of California, Davis; Pasadena Art Museum, Pasadena, California, Catalogue.
- 1972 "West of the Rockies," George Eastman House Symposium at The Oakland Museum, Oakland, California.
- 1973 Florida State University, Tallahassee.
  Two-person exhibition (with Terry Wild), Friends of Photography, Carmel, California.
  "24 from L.A.," San Francisco Art Museum, California. Catalogue.
- 1974 "Photography I/Recent Photographs by 7 Artists," Jack Glenn Gallery, Corona del Mar, California. Catalogue.

"Eight Young Photographers," Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris, France.

"Language of Light, A Survey of the Photography Collection of the University of Kansas Museum of Art," Kansas University Museum of Art, Lawrence, Kansas. Catalogue.

1975 Douglas Drake Gallery, Kansas City, Kansas.

### Bibliography

Davis, Douglas. "New Look in Photography," *Newsweek*, vol. LXXIX, no. 14, April 3, 1972, pp. 74-76; ill. p. 76. *Los Angeles Times, West Magazine*, "The Strand," (photo essay), December 13, 1970, illus. pp. 60, 62, 63, 68. Murray, Joan. "'Crowded Vacancy': Davis, Calif.," *Artweek*, Los Angeles, California, vol. 2, np. 13, March 27, 1971, p. 7; ill. p. 7.

Murray, Joan. "'The Crowded Vacancy': San Francisco," *Artweek*, Los Angeles, California, vol. 3, no. 27, August 12, 1972, p. 9.

Murray, Joan. "'Two Views of the West': Oakland, Calif.," *Artweek*, Los Angeles, vol. 3, no. 4, January 22, 1972, p. 11; ill. p. 11.

Parker, Fred. *Untitled Numbers 2 and 3*, Friends of Photography, Carmel, California, 4th quarter 1972, ill. p. 74. Parker, Fred. *Untitled Number 4*, Friends of Photography, Carmel, California, 2nd quarter 1973, pp. 6-13, illus. pp. 6-13.

Plagens, Peter. "Los Angeles," *Artforum*, vol. X, no. 2, October 1971, p. 89; ill. p. 87.

Popular Psychology. "In the Streets," (photo essay), no. 5, March 1973, illus. pp. 25-30.

Rice, Leland. "'Seven Photographers': Corona del Mar," *Artweek*, Los Angeles, California, vol. 5, no. 14, April 6, 1974, pp. 11-12; ill. p. 11.

# The Nation's Capital in Photographs, 1976

The exhibition is supported by grants from the Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation, Washington, D.C., and the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, D.C., a federal agency.

